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ON A POEM ENTITLED "THE IRISH CATHOLIC."

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*To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.\**

"When themes like these employ the poet's tongue,

I hear as mute as if a syren sung.

.....Themes that might animate the dead,  
And move the lips of poets cast in lead."

COWPER.

THE impartiality and virtuous independence that have ever been the distinguishing and peculiar characteristics of your popular and respectable miscellany, induce me to hope that you will permit me, through its intervention, to pay my feeble tribute of applause to a new work of great poetical merit, (recently published by that venerable, though persecuted patriot, Hugh Fitzpatrick,) entitled "*The Irish Catholic*," a work in which is eminently displayed superior brilliancy of fancy, pungency of wit, and originality of conception. In reading the freedom-dictated sentiments with which it abounds, my soul was alternately agitated by emotions of pain and melancholy pleasure. How pathetically affecting is the solemn and glowing descrip-

tion of the soul-depressing afflictions which agonized our ancestors in the toils of these cruel penal statutes, which will ever stamp indelible infamy on the memories of the sceptred tyrants from whose arbitrary despotism they emanated! In these pathos-breathing and historical details, in which the unmerited wrongs of Ireland are enumerated with all the energy of numbers, the genius of Erin, if such there be, seems to have communicated peculiar inspiration to the soul of the bard: for he has marshalled the host of direful evils that oppressed Irish Catholics at the period of the enactment of the penal laws, in the most natural array, and passes them in review before the "mind's eye." This representation is fraught with a solemnity of imagery that at once strikes the senses, and bursts in a full tide of gloomy remembrance on the astonished reader, whose mind is insensibly carried back on its black-rolling billows, to contemplate the heart-sickening retrospect! But when the poet has occasion to sing the exploits of Irish heroes, and "give their fame to the song," he then exerts all the powers of a poetical mind; his fervid verse breathes a soul-enrapturing spirit of patriotism, conveyed in a sparkling luxuriance of thought, that must kindle in the most frigid bosom the fire of national enthusiasm. The following apostrophe to Limerick has a melodious concordance of measure, and a majestic energy of expression, worthy the genius of Corneille:

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\* To oblige a correspondent, the following account of a poem lately published, is inserted. For the observations and criticisms, the proprietors do not consider themselves responsible. Their opinion has been already expressed in the notices to correspondents on the cover of the last No.

"Oh, Limerick! last preserver of our rights,  
To speak of thee the Irish Muse delights;  
My kindling soul glows with a patriot flame,  
When memory wafts me back thy former fame!  
Grand, powerful bulwark of our strength and pride!  
Thou stood'st unshaken, when the roaring tide  
Of stormy war, tempestuous round thee beat,  
Like angry seas when Erin's rocks they meet.  
Unconquer'd still thou rear'dst aloft thy head,  
Which Ireland's foes beheld with palsied dread;  
And when despairing to obtain their end,  
To (not inglorious) terms thou deign'dst to bend:  
A treaty worth acceptance then was drawn;  
But ere the morn of peace began to dawn,  
To England's *fame* and *honour* be it spoken,  
Ignobly base the binding terms were broken!  
That article, which Christian rights maintain'd,  
Was not to durability ordain'd," &c. &c.

This beautiful apostrophe must swell the bosoms of some of the people of Limerick with high sensations of pride, and fill them with the most reverential veneration for the memory of their time-outliving progenitors; but do they emulate the virtues of the illustrious dead? is their conduct influenced by that divine spirit of liberty which stimulated the immortal defenders of the Irish *Veil*, to perform such unexampled prodigies of valour, in defence of the freedom of their country, as will ever shed on their reputation the brightest rays of the sun of immortality? Alas! I have good reason to fear they do not: for on a recent occasion their conduct bespoke a shameful degeneracy in electing for their representative a partizan of the "No Popery" administration, instead of the patriotic, independent, and noble-minded Glentworth! Oh! shame, where is thy blush! But to return to my subject. The author of the Irish Catholic, in adverting to the rapid progress of Protestant liberality in this country, and the consequent fall of that balful and concord-subverting faction, the Orange association, before the storms of public odium, addresses the following apostrophe to the dying monster.

"O! Orphan Orangism,\* scorpion-ling'd,  
Thou human dragon with destruction wing'd!  
Fire-breathing hydra! Harpy of our Isle!  
Thou life's torpedo! snake in cunning guile!  
How nerveless is thy vigour fiend of hell!  
How crushed thy spirit since thy parent fell.  
I see thee now, foul monster, with disgust,  
Writhing in pain, and biting Erin's dust.  
Dust of the hallowed land which thou hast stain'd,  
When Irish blood thou'st for religion drain'd;  
Or when thou'st caus'd the Cath'lic far to roam,  
A wretched exile from his ancient home;  
And by the sanction of our sacred laws,  
For persecution, mad'st his faith the cause!  
Coil'd up remain, no more on mischief bent,  
Thy venom's harmless now: thy spirit spent;  
And circumscrib'd and narrow is the place,  
Which thy contracted members still disgrace!  
The fertile soil which nourishes the brave,  
Will shortly yield thee an inglorious grave;  
Ere long the hind shall tread upon thy breast,  
When Erin's cares with thee have gone to rest;  
And thus the rustic will his mind unveil:  
'Here lies the vanquished foe of Innisfail,  
That often strove her childrep to divide,  
And break the bonds by native love allied!  
The scourge of Catholicity lies here,  
Her morning terror, and her midnight fear;  
Her mortal enemy, in malice sworn,  
The vulture which has long her vitals torn!  
But thou art low, for Heaven in vengeance just,  
To save my country smote thee to the dust;  
And persecuted innocence survives  
Her persecutor; healthfully she thrives,"  
&c.

The poet, in the course of his narrative of the sufferings of the Catholics in the reigns of Elizabeth, James, and Charles, apostrophizes the goddess of liberty in the following smooth-flowing lines. He entreats the goddess to fly from the land

\* There are explanatory and illustrative notes annexed to the poem, to which the reader is referred.

of persecution to an ideal region created by his own imagination.

"Will it, dear goddess, and thou wilt be free,

Or Ireland is no more a land for thee !

Go : spread thy wings : direct thy airy flight

To heaven, or on some other region light,  
Where harmony exists, where laws are mild,

Where flourish flowers that never were defild

By faction's breath, by prejudice or ill :

Like those which scatter ruin on our hills,

Destructive, baneful as the scorpion's sting,

The blighting mildew, or the tempest's wing !

Explore (if such there be,) a happy land,  
Where superstition waves no sorceress wand.

A spot of bliss, where all alike are free,

In rank, opinion, order and degree :

Where no distinction arbitrary reigns,

Where speech is free, where language clanks no chains,

Worth estimated, virtuous deeds rewarded,

Merit repaid, and interest disregarded,

Religion treated with deserved respect,

By all, in fine, of whatsoever sect ;

And where true social unity prevails,

And justice regulates the civil scales."

To point out the many beautiful and sublime passages in the Irish Catholic would require more judgment and discrimination than I can pretend to. Indeed it would

require an abler pen than mine. I am confident, however, that if the most competent critic were to enter into a minute analysis of this production, he would find its defects, in comparison with its poetical beauties, like diminutive specks on a luminary. No eulogium of mine can add ought to the estimation in which it is held : for a work on which is stamped such poetical excellence "needs no fuel, it shines by its own light."

It is equally distinguished for being variegated with deep reflections and striking allusions, which are acumined to an *attic* point of satire, as for being illuminated by the splendid galaxies of a fertile poetical genius, which diffuse through the whole composition the unsullied lustre of Pope, and the gorgeous and classical erudition of Dryden ; every passage is strongly marked by grandeur in the thought, and felicity in the expression. In a word, the author of the Irish Catholic has arrayed the majesty of truth in the most graceful drapery of fancy, ornamented by the fairest flowers that poetical genius could select in the fields of imagination.

I will conclude, by earnestly recommending this sublime and patriotic poem to the perusal of all liberal and unprejudiced Irishmen,

I am, &c.

PYTHIAS.

*Castle-Guard, Ardee, March, 1813.*

## DOCUMENTS RELATING TO PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

### AFRICAN INSTITUTION.

*Report of the Commissioners of African Inquiry relative to the present State of the Coast of Africa, and of the Slave Trade.*

The Slave Trade is at present carried on to a vast extent ; and as the continuation or suppression of this inhuman traffic appears to be the great hinge on which the future welfare of Africa turns, we shall begin with stating its present condition, and the obstacles which prevent, and probably will long prevent, its being put an end to.

This trade having been carried on principally by the English before the abolition took place, a vast diminution of the usual number of ships thus employed immediately followed the passing of the laws

for that purpose ; and, as America had passed some severe laws to the same effect, it was reasonably hoped, both in England and Africa, that a mortal blow had been struck against this traffic, as the only two great maritime people who could effectually carry it on, had now, according to all appearance, willingly abandoned it.

The natives themselves began to entertain the same opinion ; the slaves which were brought down from the interior remained unsold, and were either sent back to the interior, or gradually dispersed as domestic slaves. As far as our inquiries have been able to discover, none of them were murdered in this part of Africa.

A cessation of the trade did indeed take place for several months ; but this space